5 EDITING

PARAMOUNT/THE KOBAL COLLECTION/REGAN, KEN

The Manchurian Candidate (Jonathan Demme, 2004), editing by Carol Littleton and Craig McKay

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Movie editing is at once technical and creative. Fundamentally it involves the cutting and joining of shots (or the use of computer software to accomplish this task electronically) to assemble a scene, then a sequence of scenes, and finally the completed film. The basic task may be rudimentary, but the process of selecting and arranging the shots is not. An editor typically has between nine and fifteen hours of footage from which to create a 90-minute film. (This is an approximation and assumes a typical shooting ratio—the ratio of exposed film stock to footage used in the final cut—for a feature film.) The decisions made in editing have an enormous impact on the film's narrative form and rhythm and on its visual, emotional, and intellectual power.

In this chapter we will look at the meaning and function of motion picture editing. We will examine the editing style developed for classical Hollywood movies, one that draws our attention away from the fact that the cinematic world is constructed from individual and independently produced shots. We will also recognize alternatives to this "invisible" style that call attention to the constructed nature of film.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- **5-1** Appreciate and understand the theoretical, historical, and practical foundations of film editing.
- **5-2** Recognize and analyze continuity editing as a storytelling technique.
- **5-3** Identify and assess the expressive uses of discontinuous and live broadcast editing styles.

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movie editing The cutting and joining of shots to assemble a film; also known as **montage**.

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MAKING MOVIES

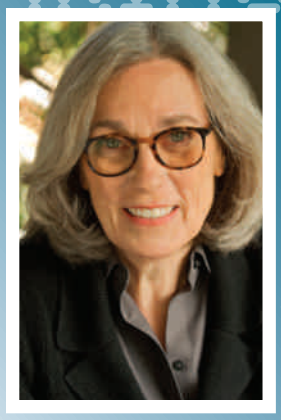

Photo by William Stetz

CAROL LITTLETON ON EDITING

Carol Littleton is a movie editor who has worked with some of Hollywood's most important and influential directors. Her editing credits include *E.T.: The Extraterrestrial* (Steven Spielberg, 1982), *The Big Chill* (Lawrence Kasdan, 1983), *Wyatt Earp* (Lawrence Kasdan, 1994), and *The Manchurian Candidate* (Jonathan Demme, 2004). In 1983 Littleton was nominated for an Academy Award for her editing work on *E.T.: The Extraterrestrial*, and in 2000, she won an Emmy for the television movie *Tuesdays with Morrie* (Mick Jackson, 1999).

Q1: Could you briefly describe the editor's contribution to the filmmaking process?

A: I generally come in after the first day or so of production, and I work simultaneously with the shooting crew. Once I get the dailies, I work on them and then move on to the next sequence and then the next and the next . . . I look at the performances. I look at the shots I have to work with. I think about the problems I may have—sound problems, a compositional problem. Or something that is particularly salient like a beautiful shot that I did not anticipate when I first read the script. A day or so after the principal photography is over, I sit down with the director and we look at the first assembly of the film. From that point on—contractually it's a ten-week period—we work on the "director's cut." Then the producers come in, and we screen the film, and it's revised again until we have the final cut. We lock that final cut, and then the sound editors come on and do their work until we have the final mix. Then it goes to the laboratory, and then we have the final version of the film.

Q2: How important are transitions from shot to shot?

A: Thinking about transitions is the most important thing a filmmaker can do in advance of shooting a scene. It's amazing how many beautiful scenes I get where no thought has been given to how we can get from one moment to the next . . . and if those transitions haven't been thought about in advance, then I have nothing to work with. Many times the simplest transition can be an abrupt cut from a day scene to a night scene . . . as simple as the transition from light to dark . . . or from having light on the right side of the frame and dark on the left and then cutting to the opposite.

Q3: How important is time in the editing of a film?

A: It's as if the metronome is ticking. At the beginning of a shoot, the script supervisor takes the script and times it. . . . While that may not be the time in the final cut, it gives me a guideline—an amount of time a scene should not exceed. We're trying to tell a story taken from 120 pages in 120 minutes. One of the most important things that film editors do is to compress time. Like the former Columbia studio mogul Harry Cohn said, "It's all about asses in seats." How long you can keep them there. We're very aware of running time, the time of each scene, how quickly a transition is made, how quickly an idea is grasped by an audience, and how quickly you need to move on.

Q4: What are the larger challenges of film editing?

A: In many regards, film editing is solving a puzzle with lots and lots of moving pieces. And you're trying to put them all together . . . to get the best performances . . . to get the best audience response out of a scene.

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5-1 ELEMENTS OF EDITING

5.1–5.3 In this short film from 1900 (*Explosion of a Motor Car*), a car appears to explode, and its contents (and passengers) fly into the air. The filmmaker Cecil Hepworth used the "stop-trick" technique introduced by the French filmmaker Georges Méliès. The cut is executed by turning the camera off, rearranging the props, and then turning the camera back on.

5.4 Yelizaveta Svilova is shown cutting film stock in *The Man with a Movie Camera* (*Chelovek s kino-apparatom*, 1929), a film she edited for Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov. The editor in that era not only joined shots but also physically cut them, hence the synonym *cutting* for *editing*.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the first films produced in the late nineteenth century were composed of a single load of the camera—a continuous length of exposed film stock. Editing was introduced just a few years later and quickly became a fundamental element of film form. Some early editing was accomplished "in camera." In such cases the camera was simply shut off, the scene reset, and then the camera was turned back on (figs. **5.1–5.3**). Eventually editing tables were designed where strips of film were cut and then taped or glued together (fig. **5.4**). This explains why the spot where one shot ends and another begins is still known as the **cut**.

Editing allowed for the move from the Lumière brothers' **actualities** and Edison's nonfiction, single-take documentaries—short movies that captured a single event—to narrative films that could bring together multiple plot points depicting a variety of actions in multiple locations or settings. In this section, we will consider how the ability to assemble, link, and juxtapose shots opened up a new world of possibilities for filmmakers.

cut The place where one shot ends and another begins; a direct transition from one shot to the next.

actualities Slice-of-life documentaries produced by the Lumière brothers at the end of the nineteenth century.

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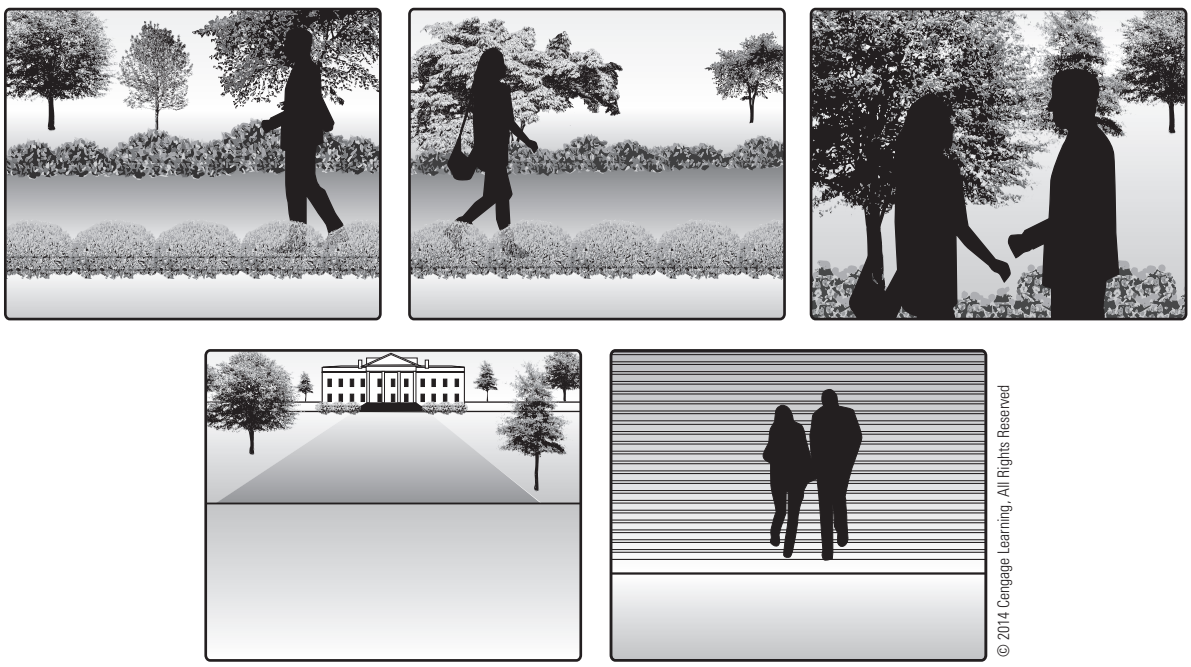
5-1a Shot Relationships

As cinematic techniques developed, filmmakers, film critics, and theorists began to debate what might constitute the fundamental unit—the ground zero—of meaning in cinema. Some argued that it was the shot. Evinced most clearly in the expressionist cinema of Germany at the time (the 1920s), this argument was rooted in the notion that each shot on its own bears a singular and specific meaning. Others, many of whom participated in the formalist film movement in the newly established Soviet Union, held that meaning in cinema emerges from the relationship between shots spliced together; in other words, meaning emerges through editing (also known as *montage*).

In Soviet montage theory, the meaning of one shot is always subject to the previous and subsequent shot. Meaning is a matter not of singular content but of context. To demonstrate montage theory, the formalist filmmaker and film teacher Lev Kuleshov presented his students with a sequence of six shots: a bowl of hot soup, a corresponding reaction from the famous actor Ivan Mozzhukhin, a dead woman lying in a coffin, a corresponding reaction from Mozzhukhin, a little girl playing with her teddy bear, and a third reaction from Mozzhukhin. Kuleshov initially told his students that the sequence proved that Mozzhukhin was an adept actor. And the sequence seemed to support such a notion: the actor's face appeared to register hunger, sorrow, and joy, respectively. But then Kuleshov disclosed that each shot of Mozzhukhin was identical, proving his theory that it is the juxtaposition of images and not the single shot that holds meaning. The shots of Mozzhukhin meant nothing (really, they could mean anything) in and of themselves.

A second Kuleshov demonstration revealed how editing can create a place that only exists on-screen, a creative geography of sorts. It involved a five-shot sequence: a man walks screen right to left, a woman walks screen left to right, they meet, we see a grand building in the distance, and finally we see a couple ascend a flight of stairs outside (fig. **5.5**). None of the five images was shot in the same place (indeed the grand building was the White House!); yet when we watch the sequence, we assume they were.

In the very process of proving his point regarding cinematic space, Kuleshov showed that five random shots cut together can create the entry point to a narrative: a man and a woman meet and ascend stairs en route to a grand building. As we can see from this experiment, cinematic time as well as space is shaped through editing. The editor's job is often to make us forget the film's running time and transport us forward and/or backward in story time through the arrangement of shots. Editing enables the medium's most difficult aesthetic enterprise: to create a believable spatial and temporal world out of pasted-together strips of celluloid projected onto a screen.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5.5 From five separate locations, editing can create a single space that exists only in the world of the film.

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5.6 and 5.7 In *Man with a Movie Camera* (*Chelovek s kino-apparatom*, 1929) Dziga Vertov uses a tonal cut to mark the transition from interior to exterior, from a dark foyer to a sunlit square.

5.8 and 5.9 A tonal cut in *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972) takes us from the cozy confines of the somberly lit den where Michael is in full control to the sunlit Las Vegas strip where his ability to muscle in on Moe Green's casino is brought into question.

5-1b Tonal and Graphic Relationships

Soviet montage theorists were also interested in the formal relationships between juxtaposed shots; for example, they realized that editing could create tonal and graphic patterns in a sequence. Tonal relationships (light-to-dark, dark-to-light) were especially recognizable in the era of black-and-white film, and formalist filmmakers created tonal patterns for aesthetic effect (figs. **5.6** and **5.7**), much like formalist photographers and painters. Early filmmakers also realized that abrupt shifts in tone could call attention to cuts, and they avoided such juxtapositions when their goal was to sustain a cinematic illusion of fluid reality. Tonal relationships continue to be significant in color film (figs. **5.8** and **5.9**).

Graphic relationships involve the arrangement of shapes across shots. Graphic patterns may have symbolic meaning or they can provide a visually striking segue from one scene to another. In a famous example of a **graphic match** (also known as a **cut on form**) from *2001: A*

graphic match, also known as a **cut on form** A way of connecting two or more shots through repeated shapes or patterns.

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5.10 and 5.11 A graphic match in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968) is a transitional device that signals a temporal shift from the Paleolithic Age to the Space Age. The symbolic meaning of this pairing is open to the audience's interpretation. Note that this is also an example of a tonal cut (i.e., it takes us from light to dark).

Space Odyssey, the cut is from an oblong bone to a similarly shaped spaceship, placed in the same spot within the frame (figs. **5.10** and **5.11**). The cut takes us from thousands of years into the past to what was at the time of the film's release thirty-three years into the future.

Graphic matches can draw attention to the artifice of film for serious or comic effect. A simple gag in Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.* is based on a series of cuts on form (figs. **5.12–5.15**). First he is seated on a mound of dirt in the desert. In the next cut, he is seated on rock (same shape, same basic position in the frame) in the ocean. He stands up on the rock and decides to dive off. In the final shot, the form at the center of the frame is now a snowdrift, and he plunges not into water but into the snow. The gag plays on the spatial and temporal relationships created by the editing scheme: desert to ocean to mountains in the time it takes to stand and jump.

long take A single continuous shot of unusually long duration.

5-1c Rhythm and Tempo

Like rhythms in music, film rhythms are experienced as a combination of tempo (speed), beats, and accents. The concept of rhythm applies from the smallest unit—the transition from one image to another—to the overall feeling of the film as a whole.

Tempo is created in editing by working with the length of shots. A shot may be as quick as a single frame or may be over a thousand frames long; it can go from one brief instant when projected to several minutes long. When directors want to slow down the pace of the film, they can use the **long take**, a single continuous shot of unusually long duration. Some directors, like Michelangelo Antonioni (fig. **5.16**) and Theo Angelopoulis (*Landscape in the Mist*, 1988), employ the long take to offer commentary on the modern condition. For these directors the seeming frozen action of the long take emphasizes a sense of ennui (boredom) as the characters are posed, literally stuck in empty landscapes.

Some contemporary directors use the long take to poke fun at the conventionally fast-paced editing of commercial action-based films. Jim Jarmusch, for example, made quite a splash at the Cannes Film Festival in 1984 with his low-budget, low-energy urban comedy *Stranger than Paradise*, a film composed of long takes that go on past all reasonable expectation; even the actors seem to lose interest in the scene before Jarmusch bothers to cut. And Sofia Coppola employed much the same style in her 2010 film *Somewhere*, in which the long takes linger on the main character, a burnt-out Hollywood actor, driving in circles or staring into space.

The long take is routinely featured in westerns not only to match the leisurely pace of premodern America but also to represent dramatically the uncluttered wilderness that the cowboy inhabits. In *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, a take lasting 1 minute and 40 seconds (inordinately long by contemporary film standards, for which an average shot length is approximately 7 seconds) shows the famous outlaw and his sidekick Charley Ford hesitating at the banks of a frozen river (fig. **5.17**).

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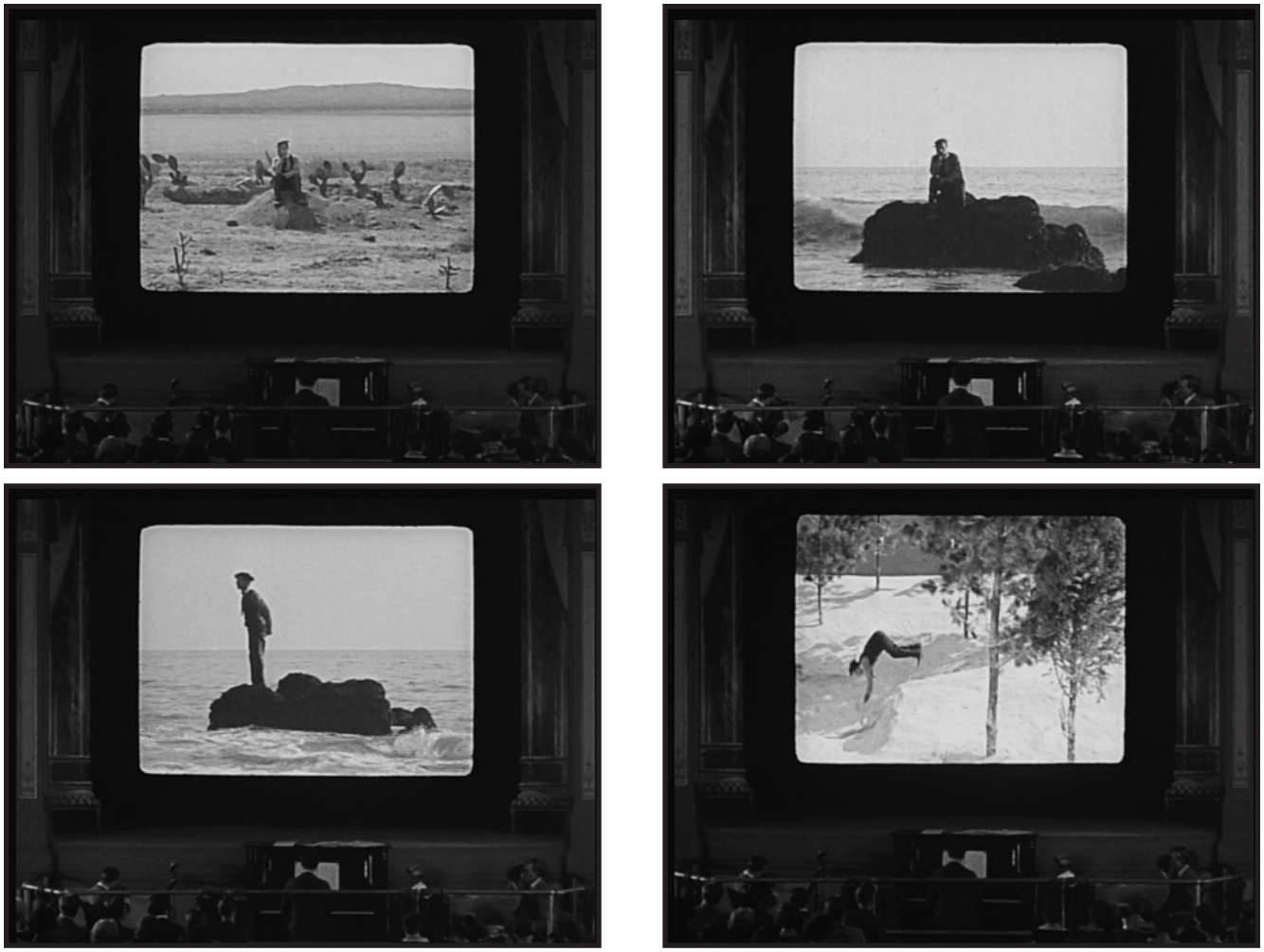

5.12–5.15 A sight gag in Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.* (1924) follows a single continuous movement against a changing landscape.

5.16 The final scene from Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura* (1960). One of the last in a series of gorgeously composed but nonetheless static long takes.

Charley is reluctant to cross the river for fear the ice might break, a fear made worse when Jesse wanders out onto the ice and then out of the blue asks if Charley has ever considered suicide (fig. **5.18**). The editing scheme slows the film down not only to ponder such a troubling question but also to isolate the characters in the vast emptied-out landscape. The extreme long shot emphasizes this feeling of isolation. A subsequent shot is somewhat shorter (about 40 seconds long) and slightly tighter (a long shot replaces the extreme long shot), again highlighting the powerful scale of the natural elements (fig. **5.19**). The characters are

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framed by untouched stands of trees and majestic mountains in the distance. These are men alone in the wilderness, their basic urges and doubts and instinct for survival laid bare in the long take.

The use of editing techniques to speed up the tempo is characteristic of modern, commercial, "thrill-ride" American filmmaking. The editing technique is fairly simple: shots taken from multiple camera positions are spliced together at an accelerated pace. To heighten the frenetic "feel" of the footage, the length of each shot gets shorter as the scene heads toward its climax. The action-edited sequence is meant to be visceral and experiential as opposed to purely realistic. As the Russian formalists argued in the 1920s (based on Ivan Pavlov's research on the reflex system), when editors accelerate the rhythm of a sequence, they can achieve a heightened emotional response.

A good example of fast-paced action editing can be found in the drag-race sequence near the end of George Lucas's *American Graffiti*. In this brief sequence Lucas intercuts camera angles to show the simple action of two cars heading away from a starting line. When one of the cars swerves off the road and crashes, we see the mishap from several new camera positions (figs. **5.20–5.26**).

The scene itself lasts less than 20 seconds, about the same duration as a real drag race, especially one that ends so abruptly with a crash. The speed of the editing simulates the frenzy of the race. That it all happens so fast, and that the event is so fleeting, fits with the fragmented and fragmentary experience of youth depicted in the film: the long periods of seeming aimlessness cruising the strip punctuated by sudden moments of excitement, sensation, or meaning.

5.17 Jesse James and Charley Ford at the start of a take that lasts 1 minute and 40 seconds in Andrew Dominik's *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007).

5.18 Jesse James ponders suicide at the end of the same long take.

5.19 A western tableau captured in yet another long take at the river.

5-1d Elliptical Editing and the Montage Sequence

One of the primary functions of editing is to manage transitions from time to time, place to place, action to action, or character to character. As such, editing offers the filmmaker a visual shorthand—filmic equivalents for storytelling phrases like "meanwhile," "elsewhere," "and then," or "in another place at another time." Cutting from daylight to dark, for example, is all we need to see to know that a day has passed. A simple sequence showing the changing of seasons or an insert showing

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5.20–5.26 The climactic drag race scene in *American Graffiti* (George Lucas, 1973) is a primer in action editing.

the pages of a calendar torn off tells us that while the filmmakers have only an hour or two to tell the story on-screen, far more time in the world of the narrative has passed.

Elliptical editing, where cuts move us along in the plot by removing parts of the larger story, is a crucial technique in the management of narrative time. Indeed it allows the filmmaker to elide (omit) events to save time in the telling of the film story. When a character begins her day, for example, elliptical editing might go like this: the woman grabs her keys off a table / cut / we see her in a car driving / cut / we see her exiting an elevator and entering her office complex. We don't need to see her get into or out of her car; in fact the editor could cut from her reaching for her keys to her entering her office space, and we would understand that time has passed (it has been elided in the telling of the story).

One frequently used elliptical editing technique is the montage. The term *montage* can denote editing in general, but the phrase **montage sequence** refers to a specific film technique in which a series of brief shots

elliptical editing Editing that allows an action to consume less screen time by transitioning between shots that suggest the passage of time.

montage sequence A series of brief shots that summarizes a section of the story.

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5.27 The training montage in John Avildsen's *Rocky* (1976) ends with the journeyman boxer atop the stairs at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

summarize a section of the story. Films attending to long periods of time—bio-pics (biographical films), for example—frequently use montages to show time passing, relationships developing, and characters aging. Films with shorter story durations still include montage sequences to quickly cover plot points that do not need full exposition. The 1976 film *Rocky*, for example, condenses the protagonist's weeks of training into a sequence of 2 minutes and 44 seconds that shows his developing strength and endurance. The montage is accompanied by a song whose lyric—"Getting strong now. . ."—hammers home the point (fig. **5.27**).

Another common use of elliptical editing is in the presentation of sex scenes. To comply with regimes of censorship, shots of fragmented body parts in brief succession imply the real sex act the filmmakers dare not show in full. Even with more modern films in which nudity and simulated sexual activity are within the acceptable range of imagery for an R rating, shots of body parts that suggest rather than show what is happening in the story remain a well-worn stylistic gesture.

Consider the sexual liaison between the male prostitute Julian and the wealthy politician's wife Michelle in Paul Schrader's R-rated *American Gigolo*. In part because this tryst is supposed to mean something more than the usual pay-as-you-go interlude—indeed, later in the film, Michelle risks everything to protect Julian—a full-figure simulation of foreplay and intercourse is eschewed in favor of a series of artful and tasteful close-ups (figs. **5.28–5.30**). We are meant to extrapolate from these fragments a larger and longer scene of the characters engaging in foreplay followed by intercourse.

The montage has become such a familiar, even cliché, technique that it became the object of satire in *Team America: World Police* (figs. **5.31–5.35**). As the song accompanying Gary's evolution from actor to super-spy explains: "[with] every shot you show improvement / [to] show it all would take too long / That's called a montage / . . . even Rocky had a montage."

5.28–5.30 A brief montage of close-ups may fragment film space and time, but it artfully implies the larger narrative of the scene. *American Gigolo* (Paul Schrader, 1980).

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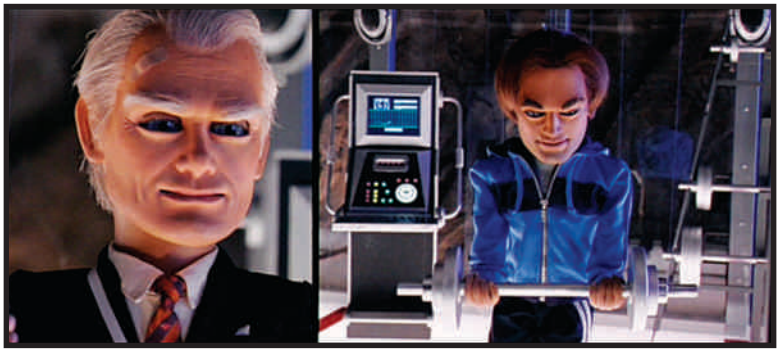

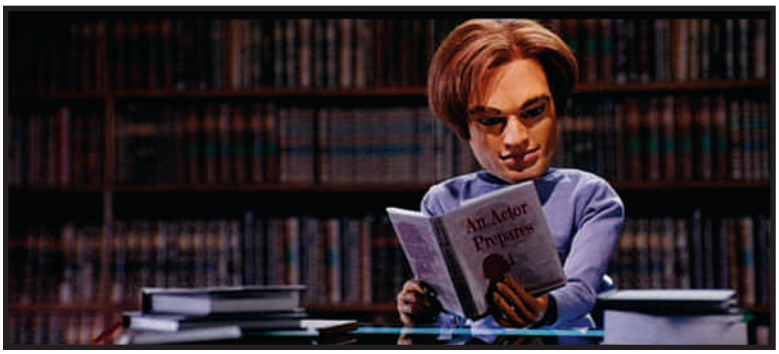

5-1e Alternatives to the Cut

As we have seen, the transition from shot to shot in most films is accomplished with a cut. But filmmakers can also focus in and then out or overlap shots, employing techniques that more elegantly or leisurely take us from one place, time, action, or character to another. In a **fade** (figs. **5.36–5.41**), the shot slowly darkens and disappears (fade-out) or lightens and appears (fade-in). In a **dissolve**, one shot gradually disappears as another gradually appears (figs. **5.43–5.46**). The **iris**, where the image contracts or expands within a small circle (fig. **5.47–5.51**), and the **wipe**, where one image appears to be pushed aside by the next (fig. **5.42**), are techniques that evoke the earlier eras of filmmaking.

5.31–5.35 "We're going to need a montage": Trey Parker and Matt Stone's tribute to the elliptical editing technique in *Team America: World Police* (2004).

fade A transitional device in which a shot slowly darkens and disappears (fade-out) or lightens and appears (fade-in).

dissolve A transitional device in which one shot disappears as another appears.

iris A transitional device in which the image contracts or expands within a small circle.

wipe A transitional device where one image appears to be pushed aside by the next.

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5.36–5.41 After Lola is shot in *Run Lola Run* (*Lola rennt*, Tom Tykwer, 1998), we find her on her back on the street. As she drifts out of consciousness, we fade out to red. This is a clever variation on the more common fade to black. After a brief dreamed interlude, we fade in to normal flesh tones to signal Lola's return to reality.

5.42 Wipes involve the use of one image moving left to right (left), right to left, top to bottom, or bottom to top to take the place of a previous image. One of the distinguishing stylistic characteristics of George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1977) was his frequent use of wipes, a nod to 1920s serials and low-budget science fiction. Of the optical transition devices listed here, the wipe is the least used and the most intrusive.

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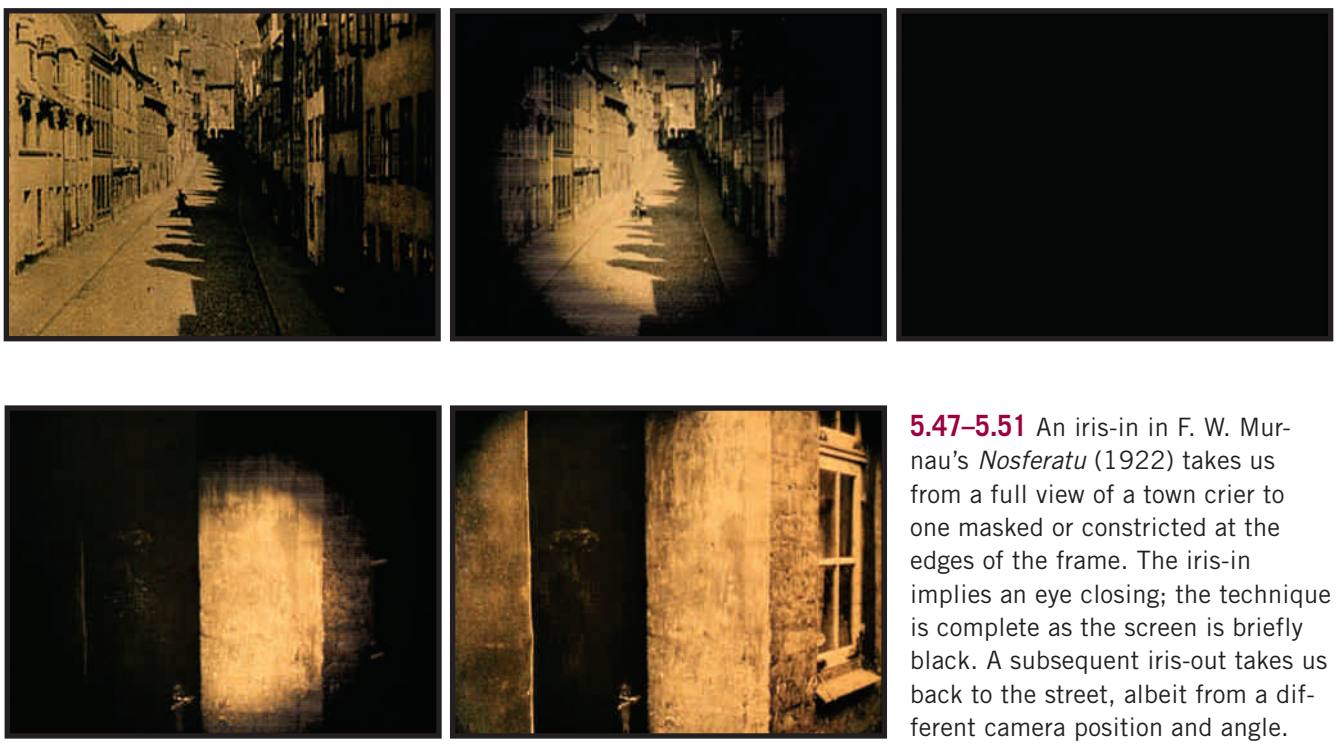
5.43–5.46 A dissolve from young Vito Corleone detained at Ellis Island to his grandson fifty years later at his confirmation. The challenge for Francis Coppola in *The Godfather Part II* (1974) was to distinguish temporally and at the same time establish significant thematic parallels between these two narratives. He did so by, at strategic points in the film, having one image (one narrative) elegantly dissolve into the other.



5.47–5.51 An iris-in in F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) takes us from a full view of a town crier to one masked or constricted at the edges of the frame. The iris-in implies an eye closing; the technique is complete as the screen is briefly black. A subsequent iris-out takes us back to the street, albeit from a different camera position and angle.

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5-2 CONTINUITY EDITING

While Soviet filmmakers were exploring the formal and expressive possibilities of shot juxtapositions (a subject we will return to later in the chapter), Hollywood filmmakers were working out a system to make editing appear seamless. **Continuity editing**, as this editing style became known, supports the illusion that each scene unfolds in a continuous time and space, when in reality it has been assembled from multiple takes and different camera positions. To achieve this effect, the editor must make sure that certain aspects of the shots match up when joined. In this section, we will look at the basic principles of continuity editing and its use as a storytelling technique.

5-2a The 180 Degree Rule

One of the ways that filmmakers give the audience a clear sense of where people and things are in the story space is by adhering to the **180 degree rule**. This basic rule, applied during filming so that the editor has workable footage, maintains that there is an **axis of action** that runs along an imaginary horizontal line in a given sequence. This line bisects an imaginary circle, and the camera must stay within one half of that circle, an area of 180 degrees; it cannot cross the axis of action (fig. **5.52**).

The 180 degree rule is useful for scenes involving conversation, when the filmmakers want to cut back and forth between the characters. A scene from the 1962 political thriller *The Manchurian Candidate* illustrates the rule and why it is effective. The first shot, called the **establishing shot** or the **master shot**, establishes the spatial relationships among the characters and objects in the dramatic scene (fig. **5.53**). Without consciously thinking about it, we absorb the fact that Major Marco is on the left, Eugenie Rose Cheney is on the right, and the train window is behind them. The subsequent shots alternate between the two characters as they converse, following a convention known as **shot/reverse shot** (figs. **5.54** and **5.55**). The axis of action is drawn between the two characters, and the camera stays within the half circle in front of the axis when filming the master shot (here, a two-shot) and the individual shots. Because the camera does not cross the axis of action and, for example, move behind Eugenie, spatial continuity is maintained. Marco does not suddenly appear facing left, for example, at any time during the scene.

When watching a conversation unfold on-screen, whom the editor has chosen to show us is significant. In *The Manchurian Candidate* scene, not only do we turn to each character as he or she speaks, but we also get **reaction shots** that show us how the listener is responding (fig. **5.54**). Together these shots enable us to follow the conversation and read its nuances (what is said and

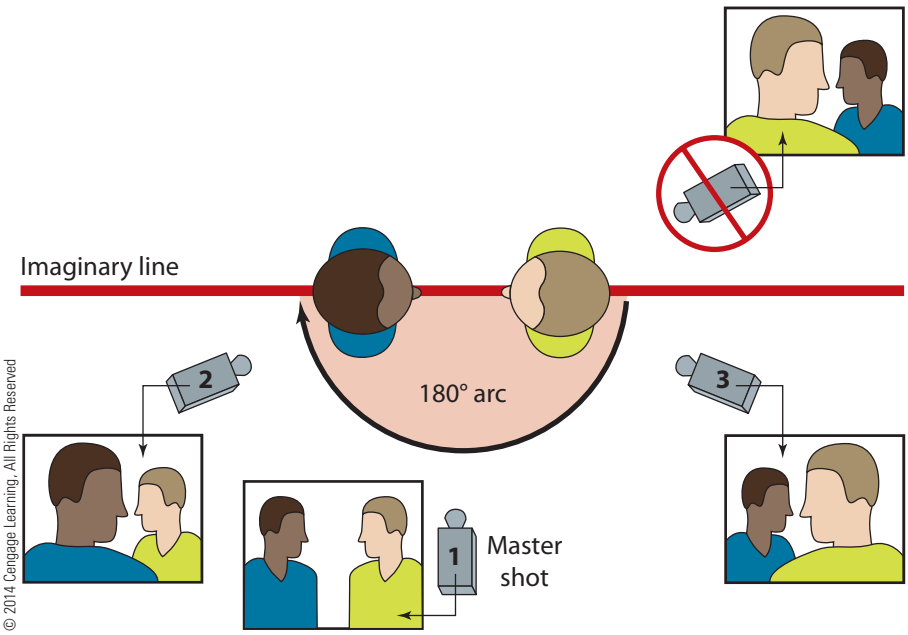
continuity editing An editing style that minimizes the filmgoer's awareness of shot transitions and in doing so supports a seamless telling of the film's story.

180 degree rule A principle of continuity editing that requires the camera to stay within a 180-degree area defined by the **axis of action**, so that the spatial relationships across a sequence remain consistent.

establishing shot, also **master shot** A shot that orients the audience for the scene that follows.

shot/reverse shot An editing pattern that cuts between two characters in conversation.

reaction shot A shot that shows how one character is responding to what another is saying or doing.



5.52 The 180 degree rule.

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5.53 An establishing shot of the characters on the train sets the stage for the audience. *The Manchurian Candidate* (John Frankenheimer, 1962).

5.54 We have only a partial view of the scene in this reaction shot, but figure **5.53** has cued us that Eugenie is at screen right. Marco is distressed by Eugenie's apparent interest in him (the close-up allows us to see the perspiration on his upper lip); she keeps repeating her contact information even though he barely knows her.

5.55 The reverse shot: Marco's anguished facial expression finds its counterpoint in Eugenie's smile and the glint in her eyes. Despite his distress, she seems to be trying to pick him up.

5.56 Marco begins to open up.

5.57 The reestablishing shot shows us that Eugenie has moved directly across from Marco; we are thus prepared for a new background behind her in the next shot.

5.58 Eugenie as Marco sees her. She tells him her address yet again. This shot lets us know that he has indeed (finally) processed this information.

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how it is received) while also making the scene more watchable. There is no action in the scene, so the editing scheme breaks up the monotony of a single shot set in a confined space.

5-2b The Eyeline Match

The **eyeline match** is an editing formula that first shows someone looking and then what that person is looking at; the next shot shows us who (or what) he or she is looking at. An eyeline match can also follow the gaze of a character to an object or place as well as to a person, in all cases giving us access to his or her point of view.

The eyeline match dates to the very first multishot films, notably found in the 90-second 1901 film *Peeping Tom (Par le trou de serrure)*. *Peeping Tom* uses the eyeline match to play on the theme of voyeurism and the pleasure that cinema audiences derive from peering into the lives of others (figs. **5.59–5.61**). We see a long shot of a man peeping through a keyhole, and then we see what he sees: it appears to be a woman undressing and taking off her makeup in front of a mirror. The payoff comes as the woman he has watched so furtively is eventually revealed to be a man.

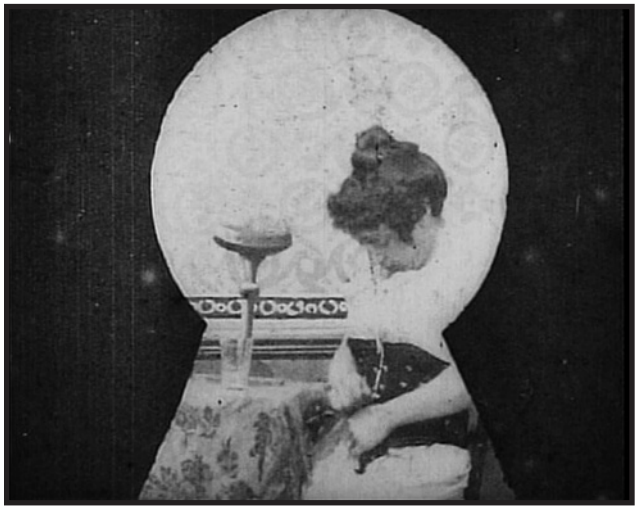
In Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, we see the eyeline match used to great effect. The film tells the story of a magazine photographer holed up in his New York apartment, nursing a broken leg. The photographer gets bored and kills time peering out his window, often with the aid of the telephoto lens on his camera. In the process of spying on his neighbors, he discovers what he believes to be a man covering up the murder of his wife.

The photographer then tries to convince his girlfriend and his nurse of his suspicions. Soon all three are looking out the window and across the courtyard. In one eyeline match from this scene, we see the photographer peering through his camera's telephoto lens (fig. **5.62**), and then we see what he sees—a man cleaning a bathroom wall (fig. **5.63**). This may be an innocent act but not in the context of the murder story the photographer has concocted. We have ample circumstantial evidence here, but we wonder: is he really cleaning his wife's blood off the wall or just doing some housecleaning?

Later, the photographer's girlfriend gets caught snooping in the murderer's apartment. Again we see the photographer look through his camera (fig. **5.64**).

eyeline match An editing pattern that cuts between a character looking and the object of his or her gaze.

5.59 The voyeur in 1901 film *Peeping Tom* (*Par le trou de serrure*, Ferdinand Zecca).



5.60 and 5.61 A stencil cutout shaped like a keyhole placed over the camera lens simulates the voyeur's gaze. A surprise is unveiled.

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5.62 "We've become a race of peeping Toms." *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1953).

5.65 The eyeline match to what the photographer sees through his lens.

5.63 A man washing a wall, a mundane act that perhaps suggests something more sinister.

5.66 Now we're convinced the neighbor has killed his wife. The eyeline match sequence is capped by a surprising return of the gaze across the courtyard.

5.64 A telephoto lens provides even greater access.

And then we see what he sees—his girlfriend wearing the missing wife's wedding ring (fig. **5.65**). We wonder along with the photographer and his girlfriend: why would the wife leave to visit a relative (the story the neighbor has told the police) without her ring?

Though the wedding ring offers yet more circumstantial evidence, there's still a reasonable doubt . . . at least until the murderer returns the gaze across the courtyard (fig. **5.66**). What makes this last image especially trenchant is that it confirms our suspicions about the neighbor just as it shows the photographer caught in the act of peeping. When the neighbor looks back across the courtyard, he turns the tables on the photographer. He turns the tables on us as well; after all, we have shared with the photographer the furtive act of peeping and gained some pleasure in snooping into the neighbor's apartment. It is a rare moment indeed when a film character looks right back at us.

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5.67 Anna succumbs to the cold and is left defenseless on the ice. *Way Down East* (D. W. Griffith, 1920).

5.69 David's frantic search is punctuated by this close-up; he has found her but his eyes signal the danger that awaits them both.

5.68 The falls, which we see at strategic moments throughout the rescue scene.

5.70 The eyeline match to what David sees: Anna out cold on the ice floe headed toward the falls.

5-2c Editing Parallel and Simultaneous Actions

As filmgoers, we are not only able to make the connection between a character and what he or she sees, but, if the continuity editing is skillful, we can also follow two or more simultaneous actions. We do not need to see any two shots or scenes at the same time, as we might in split screen (see fig. **2.18**). The very process of cutting back and forth (**cross-cutting**) cues filmgoers to read the actions as parallel. **Parallel editing** is well suited to cinematic events like rescues and chases, where multiple actions build to a climax.

cross-cutting The process of cutting back and forth between two or more parallel actions; also known as **parallel editing**.

The last-minute rescue sequence was a staple of silent film melodrama. One of the most compelling parallel sequences can be seen in D. W. Griffith's 1920 film *Way Down East*. The sequence runs for 13 minutes and is composed of well over 100 shots editing together two parallel actions: Anna's venture out into the snow and David's search for her. Once Anna is shown floating downriver on an ice flow (fig. **5.67**), Griffith adds a third parallel event, shots of the rushing water as it leads to the falls (fig. **5.68**). What makes the scene—what allows us to get swept up in the rescue—is the skillfulness of the continuity editing.

Griffith pays off these parallel sequences in a way even filmgoers in the 1920s found familiar. First a close-up highlights David's eyes opened wide to signal recognition (fig. **5.69**). We don't have to see Anna in the frame with him to know that he has found her. The

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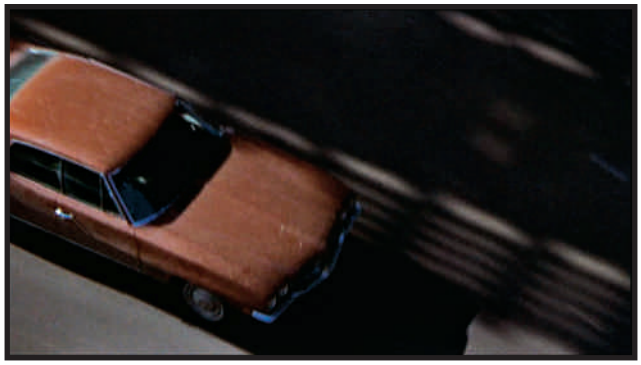

5.71 Popeye Doyle commandeers a car in *The French Connection* (William Friedkin, 1971).

5.73 A third angle on Doyle driving car in pursuit of the train.

5.72 Doyle's car continues to move from screen left to screen right.

5.74 A fourth angle puts the viewer in the back seat of the car. Note how all four very different camera positions and angles follow a consistent screen direction, showing the car move from screen left to right.

eyeline match (to Anna on the ice floe) that follows affirms what the close-up of David implies (fig. **5.70**).

In a parallel edited chase scene in *The French Connection*, we can see how consistent **screen direction**—another key principle of continuity editing—is crucial to our ability as filmgoers to keep track of the fast-paced action. When he spies one of the drug smugglers' henchmen board a train, the eccentric New York City police officer Popeye Doyle commandeers a car and gives chase. The first four shots in the sequence establish the space and pace of the chase. We see in quick succession: the car Doyle has commandeered (fig. **5.71**), Doyle driving that car (fig. **5.72**), the car from a different angle (fig. **5.73**), and Doyle's view looking out through the windshield (fig. **5.74**).

The next shot shows the train he is chasing (fig. **5.75**). We recognize the geographic logic of the pursuit because the filmmakers maintain consistent screen direction; the train is shown moving (like Doyle's car) consistently from screen left to right. A quick cut to a shot of what one might see looking out the windshield of the train (fig. **5.76**) maintains the frenetic pace, perpetuates the sense of movement (in the same direction: screen left to right), and shows in the near distance a station, a place where the villain might disembark and try to escape on foot. Subsequent shots in the sequence reinforce the sensation that Doyle is moving in pursuit of the train overhead (figs. **5.77–5.79**). Even though the car and the train are not in the same frame, through parallel editing and consistent screen direction, we understand that they have a relationship as pursuer and pursued.

screen direction The directional relationships in a scene determined by the position of characters and objects, by the direction of their movements, and by eyeline matches.

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5.75 The train that Doyle pursues.

5.76 The train approaches a station.

5.77 Cut to: Doyle in hot pursuit.

5.78 The train overhead . . .

5.79 . . . and the car below.

5-3 ALTERNATIVE EDITING STYLES

Continuity editing is the dominant mode of assembling a sequence or scene because it maintains the verisimilitude of the fictional world. Yet not all films have verisimilitude as a primary goal; not all filmmakers want audiences to "fall into" the story. Some European filmmakers of the 1920s, for example, were interested in creating a surreal experience or offering significant editorial commentary on the story. They were less interested in making editing invisible than in exploring the expressive possibilities of shot juxtapositions. Later filmmakers deliberately violated the rules of continuity editing to call attention to its artifice or to unsettle the viewer. And others break the rules to simulate the kind of editing that we recognize from the world of documentary and television production, where filmmakers inter-cut live footage from multiple, simultaneously running cameras.

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5-3a The Insert

Between 1917 and 1929, from the advent of the Bolshevik Revolution and the embrace of a revolutionary film aesthetic through the rise to power of Joseph Stalin and state-imposed film censorship, many Soviet filmmakers who were part of the movement known as **Soviet formalism** applied Kuleshov's ideas about editing to develop a style characterized by the striking juxtapositions of shots. The formalist filmmaker and theorist Sergei Eisenstein referred to this style of editing as *collision*.

One goal of this editing style was to disrupt the continuity of cinematic time and space. One unusual technique was **overlapping editing**, in which a single event is shown multiple times. In Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, for example, several acts of violence in the Odessa Steps sequence are shown and then reshown from another angle. Here the overlapping editing expands an on-screen action's duration and, through repetition, underscores its significance.

Another discontinuous editing technique is the **nondiegetic insert**, in which an image from outside the world of the story interrupts and comments in some way on the action. Eisenstein used the nondiegetic insert in his final silent film, *Old and New* (1929). He inserted images of flowing fountains into a dairy farm sequence otherwise composed of close-ups of a cream separator and peasants' ecstatic faces. The fountain is not present in the real space of the story and there is no suggestion that the peasants see or have ever seen the fountain. It is instead meant to comment upon or highlight the *feeling* of the scene. More modern uses of nondiegetic inserts include the use of printed text instructions in the work of Jean-Luc Godard. While Eisenstein uses the nondiegetic insert to heighten the impact of a scene, Godard uses it to insert an authorial commentary; indeed, at a key moment in his 1967 film *Week End*, Godard uses a nondiegetic insert to offer a useful bit of instruction; he tells us simply to "ANALYSE."

Not all uses of inserts are nondiegetic, however; sometimes an insert can be a cut to a closer look at a portion of a figure or object within the story. In the Odessa Steps sequence in *Battleship Potemkin*, for example, inserts direct our eyes in an otherwise chaotic scene of a peasant rebellion suppressed by the Cossacks. At one point, we see a woman shot. First we see a close-up on her face in anguish (fig. **5.80**), then an insert of her buckled sash (fig. **5.81**). The insert of the sash offers an intimacy of sorts as it interrupts the flow of images and focuses our attention on a specific part of her costume: her belt buckle (with its symbolic swan)

5.80 A woman in pain in the legendary Odessa Steps sequence in Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925).

5.81 An insert suggests the location of her wound. The swan is at the center of the image, against a dark background, so that it will be noticed.

Soviet formalism A film movement in the Soviet Union that took shape during the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) and unraveled in the early years of Joseph Stalin's repressive regime (1929). Soviet formalist filmmakers—including Sergei Eisenstein, V. I. Pudovkin, and Dziga Vertov—believed that the essential unit of meaning in cinema is the cut.

overlapping editing The repeated presentation of a plot event, expanding its on-screen duration and underscoring its significance.

nondiegetic insert An image inserted into a scene that comes from outside the world of the story.

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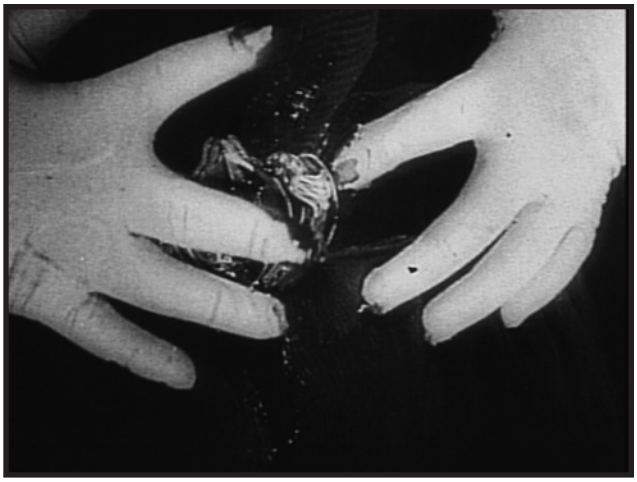
5.82 This image of the riot on the steps is intercut with the shots of the woman.



5.83 A final insert shows the wound again, oozing blood. Beauty, refinement, peace—all symbolized by the swan—have been destroyed by the Cossacks.

and the wound above it. A long shot follows, showing what is happening simultaneous to the shooting of the woman (fig. **5.82**). We then return to the insert: blood flows from the wound, engulfing the swan (fig. **5.83**). Not only does the insert evoke our sympathy and humanize this scene of mass murder, but it also makes a larger statement about the values of the two sides.

The inserts in this sequence are *metonymic*; they focus on a part of an image to refer to the whole. As such, they break up the flow of images stylistically, but they do not affect the narrative continuity of the scene. We understand that the character whose face we see in figure **5.80** is the same woman whose wound we see in close-up in figures **5.81** and **5.83**.

Like Eisenstein, who pioneered a revolutionary film aesthetic to match a revolutionary political agenda, the surrealist filmmaker Luis Buñuel experimented with editing to deliberately fragment cinematic time and space and to shock bourgeois audiences out of their complacent embrace of the status quo. In the most disturbing sequence in his provocative film *Un Chien Andalou* (*An Andalusian Dog*), created with the surrealist painter Salvador Dalí, Buñuel simulates the brutal act of severing an eyeball with a razor. The sequence is composed of three shots: a woman unimaginably calm as the razor is raised to her face (fig. **5.84**), an unrelated insert of the night sky (fig. **5.85**), a close-up of the simulated violent act (fig. **5.86**). The second shot offers an apparent visual parallel between the movement of the clouds and the movement of the razor, but Buñuel offers no narrative or thematic connection between the shots. Instead he aimed to establish something akin to the workings of the unconscious mind, in which images do not follow a continuous or coherent narrative.

jump cut A cut that seems to suggest a glitch or skip in the film.

5-3b The Jump Cut

Buñuel viewed continuity editing as bourgeois, as constricting and conventional. In its place he introduced an avant-garde editing style that approximated the discontinuity of the dream state (see the section on surrealism in chapter 8). Thirty years later, several of the French New Wave filmmakers—most famously Jean-Luc Godard and Alain Resnais—would again deliberately break the rules of continuity editing, creating the jump cut in an effort to breathe new life into film form.

The **jump cut**, so-called because it seems to suggest a jump, glitch, or skip in the film, is achieved by breaking the 30 degree rule, which specifies that the juxtaposition of two shots of the same subject must vary by more than 30 degrees in camera position. (Paired with the 30 degree rule is the guideline that when juxtaposing shots of the same subject, the focal length of the lens should change by at least 20 millimeters.)

A jump cut can appear amateurish, as if a shot has been interrupted by a flubbed line or some technical snafu and then simply resumed as if nothing had happened. Yet the jump cut can also be expressive, speaking to the ever-faster movement of images in our lives. The jump cut in this second context is a kind of abbreviation or visual shorthand, a simulation of the fast and fragmented images that abound in modern culture.

Godard's jump cuts in *Breathless* (fig. **5.87–5.89**) are glitchy and disruptive; they are cheeky in-jokes, references

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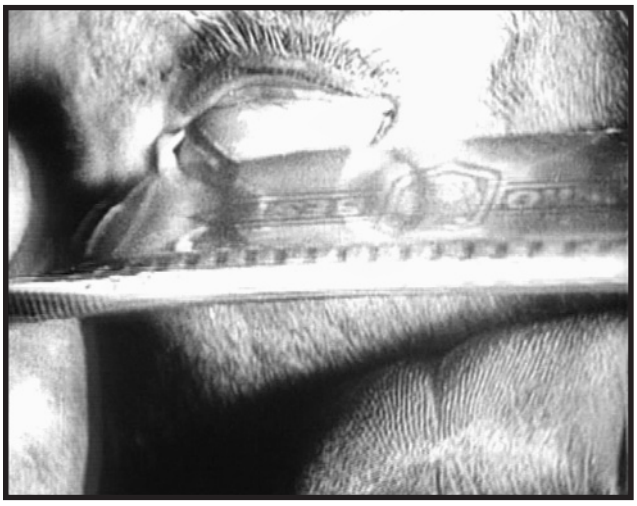

5.84–5.86 Discontinuity editing in *Un Chien Andalou* (*An Andalusian Dog*, Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, 1928).

to how conventions of film form and style shape filmic representation. For Godard, the jump cut functions as a critique of traditional continuity editing and as a satirical comment on the action on-screen. For example, as the car thief Michel and his American girlfriend Patricia

5.87–5.89 Three cuts of a banal conversation, each one breaking the 20 mm/30 degree rule. Here the jump cuts enable Godard to offer commentary on the characters' conversation and on the cinematic convention of continuity editing. *Breathless* (*À bout de souffle*, Jean-Luc Godard, 1960).

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converse in a car, Godard places the camera in the back seat. Such a camera position is unusual, especially since there is no character in the back seat to identify with. The camera position frustrates our access to the characters; we hear them but can't see their lips move. Moreover, Godard repeatedly breaks the 20 mm/30 degree rule, cutting from one image of Patricia's head to another without changing angle or camera lens sufficiently (fig. **5.87–5.89**). The editing scheme here undermines narrative verisimilitude; we are not asked to view the action on-screen as in some way an aspect of a "real" story we are witnessing but instead as a completely contrived re-presentation that, in this case, the author himself finds amateurish and amusing.

The jump cut disrupts the flow of images and implies something missing, something deliberately cut out. This should not be confused with techniques that compress and elide action. Such manipulations in duration are commonplace as filmmakers endeavor to tell a potentially long story in a compact amount of time. The jump cut calls attention to what's missing just as continuity editing suggests a logical flow from one shot to the next.

The term *jump cut* has over the years been used more loosely to denote any cut that calls attention to a break in the spatial or temporal continuity of a sequence. In *Bonnie and Clyde*, a film originally offered to Godard and made with the French New Wave very much in mind, we are introduced to Bonnie as she whiles away the time alone in her room (figs. **5.90–5.93**). This variation on jump cut editing suggests a series of snapshots pasted together, absent transitions and absent the usual seamless changes in angle or focal length. The editing style here is not, as it was in *Breathless*, a satirical commentary but instead a decidedly modern stylistic gesture that

5.90–5.93 Bonnie Parker roams her bedroom in the opening scene of Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967). In close-up we see Bonnie turn her head (5.90); mid-turn, the film jumps to a medium shot (5.91). Another visible skip occurs when Bonnie lies down on her bed. First she is sitting, her back to the camera (5.92); next she is reclining, mid-action (5.93). The jump cut style suggests Bonnie's restlessness.

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5.94–5.97 Shots of the Beatles performing are intercut with shots of mostly female audience members reacting to their performance.

leaves us feeling much as Bonnie feels at this moment in the film: impatient, restless, and anxious.

5-3c TV-Style Editing

Live TV production of talk and news shows routinely involves three cameras running simultaneously. TV coverage of live sports often involves as many as ten. An editing team in a studio booth or in an adjacent production trailer cuts from one camera view to the next as the event unfolds. This type of coverage allows our gaze to be mobile (or at least multiple). And it is directed by the choice of camera used in a given shot.

To simulate this "live action" effect, some filmmakers cover a given scene with several cameras running simultaneously and then, in the editing suite, intercut these synchronized images. This technique is frequently used for concert scenes. We hear the steady stream of audio (the song that plays uninterrupted on the soundtrack), and we see on-screen a mix of shots taken from multiple camera positions.

An example of this TV-style editing can be seen in Richard Lester's *A Hard Day's Night*, as shots of the Beatles performing are intercut with shots of mostly female audience members caught up in the event (figs. **5.94–5.97**). Lester also includes inserts of the TV crew (fig. **5.98**). The editing of shots of the band, the crowd, and the production team give us rather complete access to the event in all of its complexity, as a live performance and as an event in the process of recording and production. There is an irony in play here. We have come to accept this editing technique as an aesthetic of realism not because it reproduces the sensation of watching a live event (which we generally watch from a single, fixed vantage point) but because it resembles familiar modes of representing live events.

5.98 This insert of the TV crew further implies an event captured on the fly.

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CHAPTER SUMMARY

The decisions made in editing have an enormous impact on a film's narrative form and rhythm and on its visual, emotional, and intellectual power.

5-1 ELEMENTS OF EDITING

Learning Outcome: ***Appreciate and understand the theoretical, historical, and practical foundations of film editing.***

- In Soviet montage theory, the meaning of one shot is always subject to the previous and subsequent shots. Meaning is a matter not of singular content but of context.
- Editing is used to create tonal (light-to-dark and dark-to-light) and graphic patterns in a sequence.
- Tempo or rhythm is created in editing by working with the length of shots. The long take, a single continuous shot of unusually long duration, may offer commentary on the boredom inherent in the modern condition, or it may be used to match the leisurely pace of premodern America. The use of editing techniques to speed up the tempo is characteristic of "thrill-ride" American filmmaking.
- Elliptical editing, where cuts move us along in the plot by removing parts of the larger story, is a crucial technique in the management of narrative time.
- The montage sequence is a technique in which a series of brief shots are edited together to summarize a section of the story. Filmmakers use montages to show time passing, relationships developing, and characters aging.
- Among the alternatives to the cut are the fade, iris, dissolve, and wipe.

5-2 CONTINUITY EDITING

Learning Outcome: ***Recognize and analyze continuity editing as a storytelling technique.***

- Continuity editing supports the illusion that each scene unfolds in a continuous time and space, when in reality it has been assembled from multiple takes and different camera positions.
- The 180 degree rule maintains that there is an "axis of action" that runs along an imaginary horizontal line in a given sequence. This line bisects an imaginary circle, and the camera must stay within one-half of the circle, an area of 180 degrees.
- The establishing shot, or the master shot, establishes the spatial relationships among the characters and objects in the dramatic scene.
- The technique of shot/reverse shot involves alternating shots of two characters as they converse. With this technique, we not only see each character as he or she speaks, but we also get reaction shots that show us how the listener is responding.
- An eyeline match is two shots: one shot showing us someone looking and the next shot showing us who or what he or she is looking at.
- The process of cutting back and forth between parallel actions is called cross-cutting. It cues filmgoers to read the actions as parallel. This form of parallel editing is well suited to cinematic events like rescues and chases.
- Parallel editing is generally supported by consistent screen direction, which maintains the relationship between, for example, the pursuer and the pursued in a chase sequence.

5-3 ALTERNATIVE EDITING STYLES

Learning Outcome: ***Identify and assess the expressive uses of discontinuous and live broadcast editing styles.***

- Some filmmakers are less interested in making editing invisible than in exploring the expressive possibilities of shot juxtapositions. Inserts are images that interrupt and comment on the action. They can come from within the story world (diegetic inserts) or from outside it (nondiegetic inserts).
- Surrealist filmmakers experimented with editing to deliberately fragment cinematic time and space and shock bourgeois audiences.
- The jump cut suggests a jump or glitch in the film. It is used to disrupt spatial and temporal continuity. Jump cuts can create a collage effect, suggesting a series of snapshots pasted together.
- Live TV production routinely involves several cameras running simultaneously. An editing team in a studio booth or in an adjacent production trailer cuts from one camera view to the next as the event unfolds. This type of coverage allows our gaze to be mobile (or at least multiple) and directed by the choice of camera used. Films that simulate this style reproduce the sensation of watching a live event.

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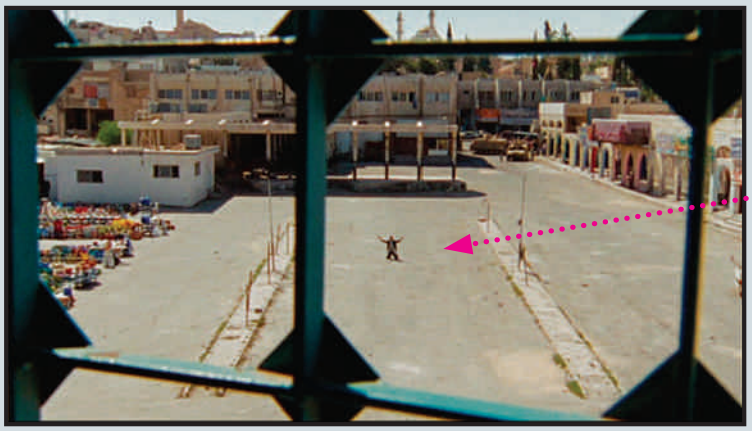
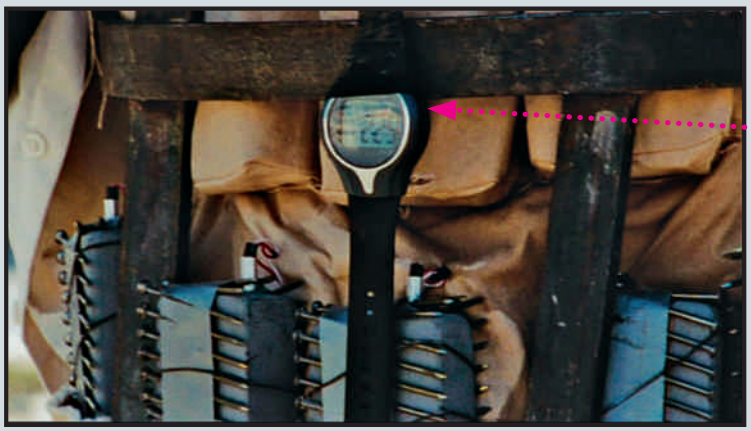
FOCUS on Editing: *The Hurt Locker*

Kathryn Bigelow's 2009 film *The Hurt Locker* follows a U.S. Army bomb squad (Bravo Company) in Iraq as it counts down to the end of its mission. In the following sequence of shots, the filmmakers skillfully mix a number of the styles and techniques we have examined in this chapter. Sergeant James attempts to dismantle a timed bomb that is strapped to a man's chest. The editing heightens the tension, as the number of cuts intensifies as time runs out. We are shown the scene from multiple vantage points in a handheld camera style that simulates documentary or news footage and adds to the sense of events unfolding in real time; nonetheless, we always know where the characters are in the scene. The final shot provides a kind of editorial commentary on what has transpired.

An establishing shot positions the bomber and troops in relation to one another and establishes the location of the action. The words we see superimposed on the image situate the event in story time: two days left in Bravo Company's rotation.



James has ordered the bomber to his knees and has told his partner to look out for snipers. We cut to an overhead view, which approximates a sniper's point of view. The bomber appears tiny, alone, and vulnerable, framed between the bars on a window in the center of the frame.



When James reaches the bomber (elliptical editing dispenses with his entire walk), the cuts offer various views that communicate the difficulty of the situation. This close-up presents a piece of important information: the bomb is set to explode in 2 minutes and 25 seconds. The rest of the scene proceeds in real time, but with more than fifty cuts.

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James attempts to defuse the bomb. The editing alternates shots of James's intense concentration with eyeline matches to the bomb. The cuts also alternate between shots of James and the bomber, whose face registers terror.

The bomb explodes. Cut to James, thrown backward from the aftershock. After a pregnant pause, we see him move to pull off his helmet, and we know he has survived. He looks up at the sky.

The eyeline match is to a kite in the sky. Another beautiful day in Iraq.

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ANALYZE EDITING

Use these questions to analyze how the basic elements, techniques, and strategies of editing contribute to the visual and story content of a film.

5-1 ELEMENTS OF EDITING	• Isolate and observe the individual shots in a sequence. What, if anything, do these individual shots mean on their own, independent of their context to previous and subsequent shots? How does their meaning change in context with the other shots in the sequence? • How would you describe the rhythm or tempo of the sequence or of the film as a whole? How does the editing contribute to this effect? • Do the filmmakers employ any alternatives to the cut, such as a fade, iris, or dissolve? If so, discuss how this effect works. • Can you discern any tonal or graphic relationships between the shots?
5-2 CONTINUITY EDITING	• Is the editing style of the film invisible, or does it draw attention to itself? • Identify the master shot in the sequence. How does that shot establish the spatial relationships in the scene? • Find a sequence that includes a prolonged conversation. Observe and discuss how techniques such as the 180 degree rule and shot/reverse shot are used to capture the visual and narrative content of the scene. • Does the sequence include an eyeline match? How is this technique used to communicate story information?
5-3 ALTERNATIVE EDITING STYLES	• Does the film draw attention to the editing in any way, and if it does, how does this affect your reading of the scene and/or the film? • Does the film use inserts, jump cuts, or TV-style editing to expressive effect? How and why?

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